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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2499  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000600

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/YERGER/GAVITO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/01/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MP MURR'S INSIGHT ON BERRI, ELECTIONS

REF: BEIRUT 578

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) MP Michel Murr reported that he is still trying to convince Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri to meet one-on-one with majority leader Saad Hariri, adding that Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa is also working on this.

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According to Murr, Berri is intentionally delaying meeting Saad because the Saudis refused to receive Syrian President Bashar Assad. Murr said that Syria agree to provide security guarantees to March 14 leader Walid Jumblatt, implying that that is motivating Jumblatt to support Berri's call for National Dialogue. If March 14 agrees on two conditions, a new electoral law and proportional representation in the cabinet, Murr said that the presidential election can proceed. End summary.

¶2. (C) The Charge, accompanied by Senior LES Political Advisor and PolOff, met with MP Michel Murr at his Rabieh residence on May 2, prior to Murr's luncheon with his son, Defense Minister Elias Murr, and Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa.

GETTING TO MAY 13

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¶3. (C) Murr, a close friend of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, reported that Berri proposed renewing the National Dialogue in order to discuss a new electoral law and cabinet division, putting off until later how to distribute the ministerial portfolios. He said he believed Berri selected the May 13 date as the next scheduled parliamentary session to coincide with President Bush's visit to the region. Murr disclosed that Berri recently confirmed to him that the Syrians were on board with Berri's initiative.

¶4. (C) Murr reported that he is still trying to convince Berri to meet one-on-one with majority leader Saad Hariri (reftel). According to Murr, Berri is intentionally delaying the meeting because the Saudis refused to receive Syrian President Bashar Assad. Murr told us that he was optimistic until he read about Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal's negative reaction to Assad's press interview, which Murr believes led the Syrians to instruct their allies to obstruct the election.

15. (C) He said that Moussa was also encouraging Berri to meet Saad and is insisting to Berri that he commit to holding the presidential election if March 14 agrees to two conditions, namely agreement on a new electoral law and on a proportional representation in the cabinet. Murr phoned us after his lunch with Moussa to report that Saad's MPs have launched a media campaign denouncing Berri's actions, and that Murr asked Moussa to press Saad to halt the campaign.

#### DECLINE IN AOUN'S POPULARITY

16. (C) Having recently broken with Aoun's bloc, Murr disclosed that Aoun's popularity is dropping. He said some Aounists contracted a prominent polling firm to assess Aoun's popularity, and the study concluded that Murr received a 70 percent favorability in Metn whereas Aoun received 25 percent. He added that surveys done in Zahle, Kesarwan, Metn, and Jbeil (all predominately Christian districts) indicate that 70 percent of the public supports the call to elect a president.

17. (C) MP Elie Skaff, who is allied with Aoun's bloc, suffered politically from the Zahle shooting incident last month, Murr continued, adding that Skaff is losing the allegiance of five of his deputies.

#### THREAT OF LABOR STRIKE

18. (C) Murr reported he met with Ghassan Ghosn, head of the labor union, to discuss the planned May 7 strikes calling for an increase in the minimum wage. Murr said he informed Ghosn that the LAF will not tolerate any street violence and advised him to avoid politicizing the labor issue.

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